

Bone Health

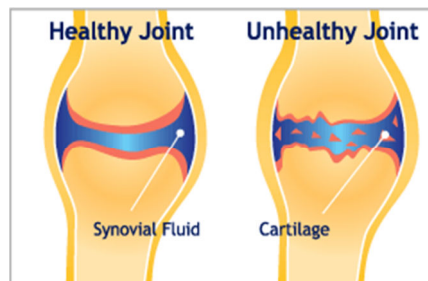
By: Sanah Ruhullah
Grand Rapids, Michigan

As much as we would like to stay young forever, our bodies are constantly changing and adapting to the stressors of daily life. Eventually, all those years of abusing our body's catches up to us. Bones in particular pay a heavy price for our neglect.

What Is Osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis, also known as Arthritis, is a disease affecting millions of people worldwide. It occurs when the protective cartilage at the ends of the bones wears down over time.

Although damage can occur in any joint in the body, this disease most often affects the hands, knees, hips and spine. Over time this condition worsens and unfortunately there is no known cure. Thankfully, there are methods to slow the progression and improve the pain. Above all, preventive measures should be taken to prevent the onset of osteoarthritis.



Interesting facts about Osteoarthritis

- The risk of having arthritis increases with age
- Most commonly affecting ages 65 and older
- Women are more likely to develop osteoarthritis
- Obesity can add extra stress on weight bearing joints, such as hips and knees
- You may be at risk if your job requires repetitive stress on joints

What steps can you take to prevent osteoarthritis?

- Weight control. In a recent study, researchers estimated that overweight woman who lost 11 pounds or about two body mass index (BMI) points, decreased their risk of osteoarthritis by more than 50 percent. This shows what a dramatic effect weight can have on your bones.
- Exercise. If the muscles that run along the front of the thigh are weak, research shows, you have an increased risk of osteoarthritis. Even small increases in the strength of these muscles can reduce this risk.

What are the symptoms of Osteoarthritis?

- Pain which occurs more during activity
- Tenderness on the joint when applying pressure
- Stiffness occurring more upon waking up
- The feeling that your joint is not able to move freely
- You may hear or feel a grating sensation when you use the joint

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms and/or are at risk of developing arthritis, it is best to consult with a doctor.

What are the medical steps taken to help patients with arthritis?

The doctor may order some imaging studies such as an X-ray or MRI. This is done so the doctor can evaluate how far the disease has progressed, and what type of intervention may benefit you the most. Once the diagnosis of arthritis is made, there is an array of medical interventions one can choose from. Choice of therapy can depend on the progression or severity of the arthritis. Also, it is imperative to remember that there is no cure for osteoarthritis, these therapies will only slow the progression and relieve the pain.

What over-the-counter pain relief is available?

For a milder arthritis, over the counter NSAIDS such as Advil, Aleve, Motrin may cause substantial relief. However, if taken for prolonged periods of time it may cause stomach discomfort. If this problem arises, it is best to consult your doctor for alternative therapy. Topical creams such as Aspercreme help in relieving the inflammation and pain surrounding the joints.

What other options do I have?

Your doctor may also suggest physical therapy. This is a great way to strengthen muscles around the joint as well as reducing the pain and improving the flexibility. Hydrotherapy, water exercise, is also a very effective way to strengthen the muscles.

If conservative treatments fail, the ultimate decision of joint replacement may be considered. This is known as an arthroplasty, where the damaged joint surfaces are removed and replaced with plastic and metal.

Preventive measures should start early in life. A few lifestyle modifications to ensure the health of your bones can lower the risk of getting osteoarthritis. Healthy bones equals a happier you.